

Working with American Sign Language Interpreters in Performing Arts

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This information can be made available in the following alternative formats: Braille, large print, and email. We also can help your group find a language interpreter to translate these guidelines. This guide is a project of the Metropolitan Regional Arts Council, made possible by funds provided through an appropriation of the Minnesota Legislature. MRAC encourages arts organizations to contact directly one of the ASL referral agencies in the Resources. Please feel free to reproduce this guide. If you use the material, the Metropolitan Regional Arts Council would appreciate acknowledgement. The project consultant in 1999 was Paula Gajewski Mickelson, updated in 2016 by VSA Minnesota.

Introduction

Congratulations! By deciding to offer an ASL interpreted performance or arts activity, you have taken an important step toward ensuring that a larger portion of your potential audience has access to your arts programs.

The following pages outline a planning process to guide you in providing American Sign Language (ASL) interpreting for artists and audience members who are Deaf and hard-of-hearing. A similar process could be used to enhance your services to, and attract more, participants with other disabilities – vision loss, mobility or cognitive disabilities, mental illness and people with hearing loss who don't know ASL.

This guide was written primarily for arts organizations who plan to incorporate this service into their arts programming on a regular basis. However, if you are using this guide in response to an immediate access request, read through all the material paying special attention to points highlighted with the ▲ symbol.

Many people in the Deaf and hard-of-hearing community (who have “communication disabilities”) communicate through American Sign Language, a system of gestures, hand signs, and finger spelling. Estimates of how many people use ASL as their prime language range from 500,000 to two million speakers in the U.S. alone, ranking it somewhere between 4th and 12th-most used language after spoken English, Spanish and Chinese.

The American with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires that state and local governments (Title II entities) and nonprofit organizations and businesses that serve the public (Title III entities) communicate effectively with people who have communication disabilities. The goal is to ensure that communication with people with these disabilities is equally effective as communication with people without disabilities. In other words, the “effective communication” rules (<https://www.ada.gov/effective-comm.htm>) ensure that:

- A person with a hearing (or vision or speech) disability can communicate with, receive information from, and convey information to, a covered entity (e.g., an arts organization).

- Covered entities must provide auxiliary aids and services (such as a qualified interpreter) when needed to communicate effectively with people who have communication disabilities.
- The key to communicating effectively is to consider the nature, length, complexity, and context of the communication and the person’s normal method(s) of communication.
- The rules apply to communicating with the person who is receiving the covered entity’s goods or services as well as with that person’s parent, spouse, or companion in appropriate circumstances.

Planning ahead and consistently providing ASL interpreting (and/or captioning and assistive listening) will allow your organization to comply with the ADA – by enabling artists and audience members with disabilities to enjoy the arts on the same aesthetic level as people without disabilities – and increase the size of your audience by developing and strengthening your relationship with the Deaf and hard-of-hearing community.

How to Use this Guide

Designed as both a planning and implementation tool to help you improve the accessibility of your programming, this guide is geared to small and mid-sized arts organizations. It can be adapted for use in any artistic medium including, but not limited to, dance, music, theatre, visual arts, spoken word, poetry, conferences, video/film, and outdoor arts events.

The step-by-step approach to providing a performance with ASL interpretation includes advice for your production manager and stage manager.

In the guide you will also find:

- Sources to help you locate an ASL interpreter.
- A list of local and national organizations and publications serving people with disabilities that can help you plan and/or publicize your arts event.

Please contact VSA Minnesota for a contract template that covers key details when hiring ASL interpreters at access@vsamn.org or info@vsamn.org

Planning Ahead

Establish your policies.

- It’s a good idea for an organization of any kind to have policies – such as an Access Plan – that guide the board and staff’s actions regarding accessible venues, events, communication and employment. Many samples are available (State Arts Board, MRAC, VSA Minnesota, State Council on Disability). In our context here, an Access Plan can help indicate the process and timeline for providing or requesting ASL interpreting or other accessibility accommodations.

Develop public relations/outreach strategies.

- It takes time to develop relationships in the Deaf and hard-of-hearing community. A consistent and thoughtful approach is necessary to building an audience.
- Outreach should be done by you, not by the interpreter. You'll get the best results by involving Deaf and hard-of-hearing patrons in the planning process (possibly in an access task force or committee).
- To gather outreach strategies, contact organizations with experience offering interpreted performances [See Resources].
- Target advertising efforts to organizations and publications that work specifically with people who are Deaf or hard-of-hearing [See Resources]. If your event is appropriate for a group's social outing, plan in advance with them how it can be most successful.
- Publicity should try to include a map to the theater, the symbol for interpreted performances, how to purchase tickets (internet, email, mail, phone, TTY or the 711 Minnesota Relay Service number), how to confirm or request ASL interpreting or other services, interpreter names and certifications if possible, any discount code, running time of the show (for those who need to schedule return Metro Mobility rides), and other details that might help people choose to attend your event.
- Word of mouth is often the best way to get information to the Deaf and hard-of-hearing community. Do not underestimate the power of this approach!
- If you use Facebook, Twitter, other social media or videos to promote shows, include accessibility information, captioning or even a video of your interpreter signing about the show.
- In cases where Deafness may be addressed in the show or cast, and thus likely to attract more Deaf participants, a Deaf Coach or team may be a good idea to lead the charge on both outreach and the many production details of working with the script, artistic staff, actors and ASL interpreters to be sure the best, clearest and culturally appropriate choices are made. This would typically be a person from the Deaf community with expertise in Deaf culture, ASL, English and theatre (or whatever art form).
- Make sure everyone in your organization understands why these accommodations are being made.

Select date(s) of interpreted performance.

- If you plan to offer a limited number of interpreted performances, choose dates later in the run of the event so the interpreter has time to rehearse.
- If you offer interpreted performances for each event in your season, determine all dates before the season begins and announce them in all communications.
- If you offer Pay What You Can performances or post-show discussions, try to give Deaf patrons the same options (keeping interpreters on-duty through the Q&A if Deaf patrons want to stay).
- Try to avoid scheduling against other competing interpreted performances. The ASL arts audience is relatively small and each person can be in only one place at a time. Compare possible dates with those already set in local Accessible Arts Calendars or being scheduled at similar arts organizations. If possible, schedule more than one ASL-interpreted (or captioned) performance, or ask your key ASL patrons which dates and times work best for them.
- Reserve a selection of seats for Deaf and hard-of-hearing patrons who will need to be near the interpreters. Include options for Deaf patrons who also use wheelchairs or walkers. Release these seats for non-Deaf use only when other seating in the house is sold out.
- Price these seats equitably; if seats near the stage are more expensive but Deaf patrons wouldn't be able to see the interpreters from the cheap seats, adjust their prices. If the only choice of performance for an ASL show is the most expensive night of the week, adjust the price to the cheapest night.

▲ **Determine number of interpreters needed.**

- The general practice is to use 1, 2 or even 3 interpreters per event. This should be decided by you and the interpreter(s).
- Considerations: length of the event, complexity of text and number of performers/characters.

▲ **Hire interpreter(s).**

- Evaluate the interpreter's qualifications by considering:
 - Years of interpreting experience.
 - Experience interpreting in performing arts.
 - Certification from the National Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) or the National Association of the Deaf (NAD).
 - References provided by the interpreter from other arts organizations the interpreter has worked with.
 - Focus of your event. For example, if your production addresses a particular ethnic or religious group, it may be of value to hire an interpreter representing that group.
 - Fees range from \$25 to \$75 per hour and are based on the following: qualifications of interpreter, length of scheduled event, date/time of scheduled event. The total price involves a negotiation process unique to your situation. Often one fee is set for a performance (e.g., \$200 to \$500) to cover everything from preparation with the script to previewing the show, fine-tuning interpretation/signs, and interpreting the actual performance(s). Discounts are often given to non-profit organizations.
 - Fill out a contract for each interpreter [See Resources].
 - The interpreter(s) should submit a bill for services rendered within 30 days of the interpreted performance, and the theatre/arts entity should make full payment within 30 days of its receipt.

Ensure access to box office.

- Your box office should be accessible so that people who are Deaf or hard-of-hearing can call to make reservations. The old TTY (text telephone or teletypewriter to communicate written words through phone lines) has been largely replaced by email, texting, online ordering or use of the Minnesota Relay Service, which acts as a third party between hearing and non-hearing individuals. There is no charge for this service.
- Post an interpreter symbol in the box office window or lobby to inform people that interpreters are available at this performance.

Secure volunteer interpreters.

- ASL students from local colleges are often willing to volunteer their services. Or, ask your patrons who are Deaf or hard-of-hearing to offer recommendations.
- Ideally, two volunteer interpreters at each interpreted event can help interpret interactions at the box office, work with the ushers, interpret questions, show Deaf and hard-of-hearing patrons to their seats and interpret any pre- and post-event announcements.
- These interpreters should be compensated with complimentary tickets if stipends aren't available.

Make programs accessible.

Your printed program should include the following:

- A listing of future interpreted events (or coded in a graphic calendar).
- An acknowledgment of the interpreter(s), with a short biography for each.
- An explanation of any specialized signs or name signs that will be used by the interpreter during the performance.
- A synopsis of the play and brief character descriptions and relationships.

- Perhaps a simple evaluation form they can leave, email or mail to share their experience or offer suggestions for future interpreted performances.

Interpreter Logistics

Prepare both the interpreter and your organization for the interpreted performance. You may wish to duplicate this checklist for your stage manager.

▲ Ensure that interpreter has adequate time to prepare.

Interpreters will need:

- The text at least 3 to 4 weeks before opening. Lyrics to songs, translations of non-English dialogue and audiotape of songs are also helpful.
- Access to rehearsals, performances and audio/video recordings of the event (if available) to rehearse.
- Access to the director, assistant director, participants or stage manager for translation clarification and consultation.
- Notification of subsequent script changes.

NOTE: The interpreters' need to attend a non-interpreted event prior to the interpreted event may vary depending upon their approach to the event and access to other rehearsal materials, e.g., CDs.

Generally speaking, an interpreter may want to sit in the event space and watch the event 2 to 4 times in addition to attending rehearsals and rehearsing backstage during any non-interpreted events.

▲ Determine where the interpreter will be placed and where patrons who are Deaf or hard-of-hearing will be seated.

In consultation with the interpreter, stage manager and, if possible, a deaf patron, decide:

- Where the interpreter(s) will be placed. They should be placed as close to the action as possible, with consideration given to sightlines from the area reserved for Deaf patrons.
- What seats will be reserved for patrons who are Deaf or hard-of-hearing and their companions.
- Whether interpreter(s) will sit or stand. If sitting, choose an appropriate type/height of stool.
- If the interpreter(s) are integrated as actor or shadow, the interpreter(s) need to be blocked and have time to rehearse with the other actors.

▲ Determine how interpreter will be costumed.

- Interpreters customarily wear appropriate street clothing when interpreting a show. You may, however, choose to costume the interpreter so that the interpreter matches the overall picture. A solid-color top that contrasts with the interpreter's skin tone is required. The style may match that of the costumes.

▲ Provide appropriate lighting and sound for interpreter.

- Two lights, cross-focused from above, are better than one. They should have a dim/bright limit and black out at the end of each act when there are no more words/lyrics/sounds to interpret.
- If there are lines in the text that are delivered in the dark, interpreter lighting should be brought to a level so that Deaf audience members can see the interpretation and facial expressions clearly.
- If the production (such as a concert) uses a sound system with monitors, provide the interpreter(s) with a monitor, preferably with voice-only feed or assistive listening so they can hear the words as clearly as possible.
- The space to be occupied by the interpreter may need to be delineated by glow tape.

▲ See to stage management details.

- Inform participants in your organization of the interpreted event and interpreter placement.
- Plan exits and entrances with the interpreters before the event.
- Provide space in a dressing room where the interpreters can prepare for the event.
- Provide for safe storage of the interpreters' valuables.
- Make sure the interpreters get calls (e.g., 30 minutes, 15 minutes, etc.) before the start of the event.
- Acknowledge the interpreter(s) during a curtain call. Make the participants and interpreter(s) aware of how this will be handled.

Resources

▲ Accessibility Symbols

These symbols may be used in press releases, brochures, signs, forms, maps, floorplans, advertisements and newsletters. You can download symbols from their website at

https://graphicartistsguild.org/tools_resources/downloadable-disability-access-symbols. You may also obtain a CD of all the symbols by contacting: the Graphic Artists Guild Foundation at 212-791-3400 or email admin@graphicartistsguild.org.

▲ Finding Interpreters

These organizations can help you find and schedule an interpreter. (listed in alphabetical order)

- * **All Hands Interpreting Service** – Web: <http://www.deafstuffmore.com>.
Bloomington. General interpreting.
Phone: 877-451-1010, 612-242-5122, 952-888-2365, v/tty; Fax 952-888-2532.
Email: info@deafstuffmore.com.
- * **ASLBlend** – Web: <http://aslblend.org>.
Golden Valley. Interpreting services not covered under the ADA.
Phone: 651-340-9514, VP: 651-927-7865.
Email: aslblend@aslblend.org.
- * **ASL Interpreting Services and Dynamic Communications Inc.** – Web: <http://www.aslis.com>.
Golden Valley. General interpreting.
Phone: 763-478-8963, VP: 952-388-2141, 866-275-3323, Fax 763-478-3093.
Email: info@aslis.com or pam@aslis.com.
- * **CODA Brothers Interpreting** – Web: <http://codabrothers.com> or www.facetimeinterpreting.com.
Eagan. Interpreting by video (FaceTime) and onsite services.
Phone: 612-424-2751, VP 952-283-0271.
Email: info@codabrothers.com.
- * **Keystone Interpreting Solutions, INC.** – Web: <http://www.kisasl.com>.
St. Paul. General interpreting.
Phone: 651-454-7275, Cell 612-251-1613 or 612-840-7600.
Email: info@kisasl.com.
- * **Middle English** – Web: <http://middle-english.com>.
Minneapolis. General interpreting.
Phone: 612-747-2813 or 612-747-7646.
Email: Schedule@middle-english.com.
- * **VSA Minnesota** – Web: <http://vsamn.org>.

Minneapolis. Its *Accessible Arts Calendar* lists arts events with ASL interpreting, captioning, etc. Can contact 100+ ASL theatrical interpreters who work at arts events and venues. Sample ASL interpreting guidelines, contract template, publicity contacts, other resources.

Phone: 612-332-3888.

Email: access@vsamn.org or info@vsamn.org.

▲ Assistive Listening Systems and Captioning

- * **ADA Standards** – <http://www.ada.gov/regs2010/2010ADASTandards/2010ADASTandards.pdf>
Department of Justice Standards (2010) for Titles II and III.
- * **Assistive Listening Systems** tap into a room's audio amplification microphones and speakers to amplify the volume and improve hearing for persons using assistive listening receivers, hearing aids, loops, etc. The minimum number or required ALDs (devices) is addressed in section 219 of the ADA Standards on pages 76-77. Local providers include:
 - * **Harris Communications:** <http://www.harriscomm.com/>, 800-825-6758, 800-825-9187 TTY, 952-388-2152 VP, info@harriscomm.com, 15155 Technology Dr., Eden Prairie, MN 55344.
 - * **Williams Sound:** <http://www.williamssound.com>, 800-328-6190 or 952-943-2252, info@williamssound.com, 10300 Valley View Road, Eden Prairie, MN 55344.
- * **Open captioning** (everyone can see it) describes text displayed alongside live speech, dialogue or performance. It is typically projected on a screen or displayed on an LED digital unit.
Closed captions are displayed on individual devices that only the user(s) can see.
CART (Computer Aided Realtime Translation) is a service provided by professionals who use special equipment and shorthand to caption presentations in "real time" – conferences, workshops, shows, etc. – projecting the captions on screens, digital readout units or other means of output arranged by the venue or the CART company. Local providers include:
 - * **Paradigm Reporting & Captioning Inc.**, Minneapolis: 612-339-0545 or 800-545-9668, caption@paradigmreporting.com; <http://www.paradigmreporting.com>.
 - * **Riverside Captioning Company**, based in Hudson, WI, is a division of Northwestern Court Reporters: 715-386-0799, 800-628-7551, feedback@closed-captioning.com, <http://www.closed-captioning.com/who-is-riverside-captioning>, or www.nwcourtreporters.com.
 - * **C2 inc.** (Caption Coalition) provides open captioning for theatre productions around the country, including at the Guthrie, Ordway, State/Orpheum: 917-733-3515, davidchu.c2@gmail.com, <http://www.c2net.org>.

▲ Publicity

In addition to including ASL information in regular publicity, contact media and organizations that communicate with the Deaf community.

- * **Access Press** – Web: <http://www.accesspress.org>.
A monthly newspaper for Minnesota's disability community, with copies available at many locations or online. Submit listings by the 25th of each month.
Phone: 651-644-2133.
Email: access@accesspress.org.
Address: 161 St. Anthony Ave. W., #910, St. Paul, MN 55103.
- * **DeafMN.com** – Web: <http://deafmn.com/events/community/add>.
Part of the nonprofit Signcasts, DeafMN.com provides a calendar and news relevant to the Minnesota Deaf, Hard of hearing, and signing community. Set up an account to post news online.
Phone (VP/Relay): 651-964-2841.
Email: deafmn@signcasts.com, tcdeaf@signcasts.com or (director) brein@signcasts.com.

- * **MinnesotaPlaylist** – Web: <http://www.minnesotaplaylist.com>.
An easily searchable, up-to-date local arts performance calendar includes accessibility listings for shows playing in Minnesota as well as audition notices, a database of local talent (including ASL interpreters and audio describers), a theater trade magazine, and more. Post your own shows or advertise services and talent by setting up a free account.
Email: info@minnesotaplaylist.com.
- * **VSA Minnesota** – Web: <http://vsamn.org/community/calendar>.
VSA's *Accessible Arts Calendar* is updated online regularly and emailed monthly. Submit information into an online form, fill out an emailable calendar template, or just copy VSA on your regular news releases, making sure to include all relevant ASL information: performance date/time(s), running time of the show, interpreter name(s), if advance notice is requested, ticket prices, discount codes and any special email or other contact information.
Phone: 612-332-3888.
Email: access@vsamn.org or jon@vsamn.org.
Address: 528 Hennepin Ave. #305, Minneapolis, MN 55403

▲ Other Local Resources

These organizations also have a variety of experience in communicating with the Deaf community, doing outreach, planning ASL interpreted event, etc.

- * **DeafBlind Services of Minnesota** – Web: <http://www.dbsmlc.org>.
DBSM provides services statewide to people who are deafblind including children, youth and family services (CYFS), adult community services (ACS), independent living skills, adjustment to blindness/deafblindness, and pro-tactile training. DBSM is a limited liability corporation of Vision Loss Resources (<http://visionlossresources.org/programs/dbsm>).
Phone: 612-362-8454, VP 952-338-2102, TTY 612-362-8422.
Email: info@dbsm.org or info@vlrw.org.
Address: 1936 Lyndale Ave. S., Minneapolis, MN 55403.
- * **Guthrie Theater** – Web: http://www.guthrietheater.org/visit/access_services.
Many ASL-interpreted, captioned and audio described shows, loanable audio description equipment. Accessibility Coordinator: Hunter Gullickson.
Phone: 612-225-6243, 612-225-6390.
Email: accessibility@guthrietheater.org.
Address: 818 2nd St. S., Minneapolis, MN 55415
- * **Metropolitan Regional Arts Council (MRAC)** – Web: <http://www.mrac.org>.
St. Paul. Increases access to the arts in the 7-county metropolitan area communities by providing information, organizational support and grants. Phone: 651-645-0402.
Email: mrac@mrac.org
Address: 2324 University Ave. W., #114, St. Paul, MN 55114.
- * **Minnesota Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services Division (DHHS)** – Web: <http://www.mn.gov/dhs/deaf-hard-of-hearing>.
St. Paul. Provides information, resources (including list of interpreter agencies) and opportunities to assist deaf, deafblind and hard of hearing Minnesotans.
Phone: 651-431-5940, VP 651-964-1514.
Email: Dhhs.metro@metro.state.mn.us.
Address: 85 7th Place E., #105, St. Paul, MN 55101.

- * **Minnesota DeafBlind Association** – Web: <http://www.deafnonprofit.net/mdba>.
 MDBA, governed by DeafBlind people, serves DeafBlind people in Minnesota by sponsoring leadership meetings, community workshops and special events.
 Phone: 651-647-6564 Voice/TTY.
 Email: mdba@visi.com.
 Address: 1821 University Ave. W., #S-117, St. Paul, MN 55104.
- * **MinnesotaHelp.info** – Web: <https://www.minnesotahelp.info/Index>.
 This statewide resource database is sponsored by the Minnesota Board on Aging, Department of Human Services (DHS) and other partners, including the **Disability Linkage Line**. It assists with navigating over 10,000 helping agencies in Minnesota.
 Phone: 800-333-2433. **Disability Linkage Line** 1-866-333-2466.
- * **Minnesota Relay Service** – Web: <https://www.fcc.gov/general/telecommunications-relay-services-directory>.
 MRS can help arrange interpreters, talk with a Deaf person on the phone, etc.
 Phone: 711; customer service 800-676-3777; metro information & presentations: 651-431-5490.
- * **Minnesota State Arts Board** – Web: <http://www.arts.state.mn.us/contact>.
 Accessibility Coordinator Natalie Kennedy-Schuck can assist with arts accessibility questions. Some national links are at <http://www.arts.state.mn.us/contact/ada.htm>.
 Phone: 651-215-1617 or 800-866-2787.
 Email: msab@arts.state.mn.us or Natalie.Kennedy@arts.state.mn.us,
 Address: 400 Sibley St. #200, St. Paul, MN 55101.
- * **VSA Minnesota** – Web: <http://www.vsamn.org>.
 The nonprofit state organization on arts and disability based in Minneapolis provides an *Accessible Arts Calendar*, how-to resources, access plans, lists of ASL interpreters, captioners and audio describers, a loanable digital caption unit, and other assistance. Contact Jon Skaalen or Craig Dunn.
 Phone: 612-332-3888.
 Email: access@vsamn.org or info@vsamn.org.
 Address: 528 Hennepin Ave. #305, Minneapolis, MN 55403

* *This is primarily guidance for interpreting at “performances” or “arts events” or some other term(s).*

October 2016